

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LILONG 00523 101411Z

ACTION HA-05

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FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1778

C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 0523

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, MI

SUBJECT: RELOCATION OF ASIANS IN MALAWI

REF: STATE 089747; LILONGWE A-8 OF MARCH 9, 1978; LILONGWE
2065 (77); LILONGWE A-15 OF MARCH 21, 1975

1. APRIL 5 FBIS REPORT WHICH YOU NOTED REFERRED TO THE
FINAL CARRYING OUT OF AN ORDER GIVEN 3 YEARS AGO THAT ASIANS
WERE TO DISPOSE OF THEIR BUSINESSES IN THE SMALL TOWNS
AND RURAL CROSSROADS AND CARRY ON THEIR COMMERCIAL
ACTIVITIES ONLY IN THE 3 LARGEST CITIES, VIZ. BLANTYRE-LIMBE,
ZOMBA AND LILONGWE. ORIGINALLY THE ORDER GAVE THE ASIANS
TWO YEARS BUT WHEN THEY TOLD PRES. BANDA THIS WOULD BE
A HARDSHIP, HE GAVE THEM AN EXTRA YEAR. BY MARCH 31, 1978,
THE DEADLINE DATE THE 1000-1500 PERSONS INVOLVED
(INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION ESTIMATE) HAD SOLD OR OTHERWISE
DISPOSED OF THEIR PROPERTIES AND EITHER MOVED INTO THE
ABOVE CITIES OR EMIGRATED TO GREAT BRITAIN. ABOUT 90 PERCENT
WERE EITHER BRITISH PASSPORT HOLDERS OR ENTITLED TO
APPLY FOR BRITISH RESIDENCE UNDER SPECIAL MEASURES.

2. NEITHER THIS EMBASSY NOR THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION
NOR THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION HAVE HEARD OF ANY INCIDENTS
OF HARASSMENT OR FORCE BY THE MALAWIAN POLICE OR THE
POPULACE. NOR HAVE THERE BEEN ANY REPORTS OF LOOTING
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LILONG 00523 101411Z

OR EXPROPRIATION. NO SPECIAL COMPENSATION PROVISIONS
WERE MADE BUT IN THREE YEARS ALMOST ALL, IF NOT ALL, OF
THE PEOPLE AFFECTED WERE ABLE EITHER TO SELL OUT THEIR
STOCKS OR SELL THEIR BUSINESSES TO MALAWIANS. THERE WAS
NO NEED FOR SUPPLYING TEMPORARY SHELTER OR OTHER BASIC
NEEDS.

3. AS TO WHETHER THIS RURAL RELOCATION MAY BE THE

FIRST STEP TOWARDS THE GENERAL EXPULSION OF ALL ASIANS, WE ARE INCLINED TO DOUBT IT BUT CANNOT BE SURE. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF ASIANS HAS DROPPED FROM ABOUT 12,000 TO 6,000 IN THE PAST 4 YEARS. MOST HAVE EMIGRATED TO GREAT BRITAIN. THOSE REMAINING DO HAVE IMPORTANT AND LUCRATIVE COMMERCIAL TRADING BUSINESSES IN THE 3 CITIES. IN FACT, IN TOTAL TRADE TERMS PROBABLY NOT MORE THAN 15-20 PERCENT HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY THE MOVE FROM THE RURAL AREAS.

4. WITH REGARD TO NEWS MEDIA, THERE HAS BEEN NO RUNNING CAMPAIGN PLAYING TO OR INCITING ANTI-ASIAN FEELING. HOWEVER, THE MEDIA FOR A FEW DAYS PLAYED TO THE GENERAL SATISFACTION THROUGHTOUT THE MALAWIAN GENERAL POPULACE AT THE CARRYING OUT OF THIS MEASURE. IT WAS ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECIEVED AND ENDORSED.

5. ASIANS, PARTICULARLY HINDUS WHO ARE THE VAST MAJORITY, ARE NOT POPULAR IN MALAWI. IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE YEARS, EXCEPT FOR A FEW MOSLEM ASIANS, MOST ASIANS OPENLY IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES IN SUPPORT OF THE BRITISH COLONIAL REGIME. WHEN INDEPENDENCE CAME THEY HAD A CHANCE TO OPT FOR MALAWIAN CITIZENSHIP BUT ONLY A HANDFUL OF MOSLEMS ACCEPTED THE OFFER. IN THE RURAL AREAS THEY HAD A RECORD OF SHARP PRACTICES, EXPLOITATION AND CLANNISHNESS IN UNITING TO KEEP NON-ASIANS (MALAWIANS) FROM GOING INTO RETAIL TRADE AND COMMERCE. BANDA WAS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LILONG 00523 101411Z

QUITE FRANK IN STATING THAT HIS MEASURE WAS DESIGNED TO GIVE MALAWIANS A CHANCE TO BECOME SMALL BUSINESSMEN AND THAT TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE IT WAS NECESSARY TO PUSH OUT THE ASIANS. TOUGH, YES, BUT VIEWED BY ALL MALAWIANS AS A WELL-JUSTIFIED KIND OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM.

6 BOTH THE INDIAN AND BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONS FEEL THAT IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES THE MOVE WAS CARRIED OUT WITHOUT UNDUE HARSHNESS AND PRESSURE. IN ONE CASE OF A DISPUTED LOCATION, THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION APPEALED FOR MORE TIME FOR THE ASIANS CONCERNED AND 3 MORE MONTHS WERE GRANTED. IN SUM, WE DO NOT THINK THERE IS ANY REAL BASIS FOR U.S. CONCERN OR FURTHER ACTION. STEVENSON

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